HM

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF ST. JOHN'S UNITARIAN CHURCH, CINCINNATI, OHIO

History of St. John's Unitarian Church
1814 to 1924

Good evening, welcome to St. John's Unitarian Church. I'm Dick Reiman and I'm going to tell you something of the history of St. John's Unitarian Church from the period 1814 to 1924. I'll be referring to the 150th Anniversary Booklet which was distributed earlier. Please share with your neighbor.

Before I start, let me acknowledge some of my sources from our history file. These include "History of St. John's Unitarian Church" by Reverend Hugo G. Eisenlohr, May 1934, and "Translation from the Minute Book" by Reverend M. P. Davis who translated the Church's minutes from German to English. The material was wonderfully organized by our Historian, Isolina Cartlidge.

If you open the cover, on the inside is a photograph of the sanctuary of the church at 12th and Elm which I knew as a boy. Note the lower pulpit at eye level for the worldly mundane matters, and above it, the high pulpit in wine glass shape for the more serious sermon. Reverend Hugo G. Eisenlohr was Minister Emeritus then, and Reverend Julius Krolfifer the Minister. Their pictures are on page 5.

Next, turn to page 2 of the booklet which presents a capsule of the history of the period 1814 to 1924. Let me begin by taking you back to 1814 to Cincinnati, a town on the "western frontier" which had been freed from Indian attack by the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1793.

In 1814, a Dr. Dreher, a representative of the United Brethren in Christ, came to Cincinnati to organize a church but early records speak of his lack of success. Others mention him as successor to Joseph Zaeslin.

Also in 1814, Joseph Zaeslin came as a missionary of a Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania when he was 47 years old. He had previously been a pastor of a Moravian congregation for nine years. He was born is Basil, Switzerland and benefitted from a classical education and was said to be a gifted orator. He organized the German element of Cincinnati and gathered not only Protestants but Catholics as well, there being no Catholic church in existence at that time. The congregation adopted the name "German Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Church", and retained it for 20 years. The congregation dwelt together in harmony under Joseph Zaeslin but his ministry was short, ending with his death in 1817. Later, as the Catholic churches were organized, the congregation became Protestant only. The first Catholic church was Christ Church which was organized in 1819.

Following the death of Joseph Zaeslin, an educated and efficient layman, Jackob Guelich, took over duties of Minister and is credited with keeping the church alive until 1820, when Ludwig

Heinrich Meyer (1820-1835) became Pastor. Reverend Meyer was from northern Germany, a Low German (reference to elevation) and, therefore, a "Plattdeutsche". The southern Germans were High Germans or "Schwabens". Besides differences in dialects, the northern Germans were followers of Martin Luther and were more orthodox than the southern Germans who followed "Zwingli" and were more liberal. The Communion was the great point of difference between Luther and Zwingli, and on the interpretation of the words "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood".

One of Reverend Meyer's first duties was to raise funds for a new church among the prosperous Germans of Pennsylvania, and a horse was purchased for the journey. The trip was successful since approximately $1,000 was raised both on the trip and from local contributions, and a new church was subsequently built at East 3rd Street between Ludlow and Broadway, possibly near the site of old Fort Washington. Note the map on page 6 for this location.

The arguments for and against a new church during Jacob Guelich's days became so spirited during a congregational meeting, that the floor collapsed and the whole congregation landed in the basement, luckily without serious injury to those present.

Reverend Gulich and Reverend Meyer had great interest in a German Church School, and in the beginning while the congregation was small, all was harmonious and the school attracted Germans to the city from 100 miles or more. As the congregation grew in numbers, a discord appeared concerning the Pastor-Teacher's ciriculum and teaching methods, some favoring the new ways. Ludwig Meyer chose escape and accepted a call to a church in Bremen in northern Ohio.

The disharmony over the friction between the two groups, Low and High Germans, may have been the reason for the first split, when a number of the congregation left with Reverend Phillip Hauser to form the "United Protestant Evangelical German St. Peter's Church", and located in a small church building on Elm Street above Third Street. I've attached a chart which shows this and subsequent splits from St. John's etc. from information provided by Reverend M. P. Davis to Isolina Cartlidge. Robert Rau has a similar chart and I checked this one for accuracy with his.

The St. John's Congregation purchased a church formerly used by an Episcopal congregation at 6th and Lodge Street. This location also appears on a map on page 8 of the 150th Anniversary Booklet.

"The old congregation showed remarkable vitality", Hugo G. Eisenlohr notes in his "History of St. John's Unitarian Church" and thrived, perhaps even enjoyed the wrangling and fighting. A successor to Ludwig Meyer, Reverend H. W. Lauer (1835-1837), was

shortly followed by Reverand Wilheim Moelmann (1837-1838) who won election over candidate Steinmeyer by a vote of 286 to 231. The feelings between the proponents were so bitter that Reverend Steinmeyer withdrew and returned to Germany where he became a Professor at the University of Bonn. Moelmann shortly thereafter resigned from St. John's and took with him a Low German (Plattdeutsche) group to later form the "North German Lutheran church" on Walnut Street and Buckey Alley between 8th and 9th. In 1874 this church became the "Third German Protestant Church", and later "Third Protestant Memorial" and is now located at Ohio and Calhoun Streets. Reverend Rashig followed Moelmann at St. John's, but again just for a short duration.

Benjamin Franklin, commenting on the quarrelsome nature of the Germans in Philadelphia in 1753 said: "Their clergy have very little influence on the people who seem to take pleasure in abusing and discharging their ministers on every trivial occaion. Not being used to liberty, they seem not to how to make the most of it." Perhaps Franklin misunderstood the intensity of their feelings. These most likely came from their beliefs in the old country and were worth fighting for in the new.

The stage was set for Reverend August Kroell (1841-1874) to bring order out of chaos, and to become the outstanding liberal Protestant Minister of the midwest.

Kroell was born in Rohrback in Hessen on July 23, 1806, and received an education at the Gymnasium at Buedingten (1818-1826), and at the University of Giessen. After passing the state examination, he became vicar or assistant at Echardtshausen but without much chance to advance because of his "humble" birth. He joined a band of emigrants who were to sail from Bremen to Baltimore.

The first vessel scheduled to leave in April 1834 was instead stranded on the coast of Scotland and failed to appear. Finally on June 6, the "Medora" sailed for Baltimore and arrived August 15. Landing at Baltimore, Kroell travelled by foot to Wheeling, then by flatboat to Paducah, Kentucky. Only an appeal to the local court pursuaded the boat owner to take him to St. Louis, his rightful destination. He tried farming with his fellow passenger Dr. Bruehl, a physician. However, this did not satisfy him, and when his friend died, he accepted a call to a German Evangelical Church in Louisville, and stayed for a year and a half. Incidentally, this church later also became Unitarian and burned to the ground in 1985. It is being rebuilt.

His wise and beneficient leadership began October 7, 1841 and the congregation took on new life due to the personality of Reverend August Kroell. Hugo Eisehlohr remembers: "He was a man of imposing

appearance, tall, broad-shouldered, erect, with a kindly eye and a beneficient countenance---He was an outspoken liberal and well able to hold his position in controversy or debate." He soon became one of the best known figures in the city, especially among the many liberal Germans who came to Cincinnati from Germany after the failed liberal revolution of 1848 and 1849. His friendship included many of different faiths and all levels of wealth or social status. He founded the religious weekly "Protestantische Zeiblaetter", a journal of outspoken liberalism. One of his collaborators and later editor was Reverend Gustov Eisenlohr, father of Hugo G. Eisenlohr, and Minister of "German Evangelical St. Pauls" (1857-1879), a church which had split from North German Lutheran Church in 1845. August Kroell and Reverend Robert Clemen served jointly for a short time there until the first Minister Reverend C. H. Straeter (1845-1846) assumed leadership. St. Peters and St. Pauls united in 1948, and are currently located on Queen City and Ferguson Roads.

Soon the old church became too small for St. Johns, which called itself "German St. Johns" in 1839, and the planning process, delayed by the Civil War, was completed with the building of a new church in the "Over the Rhine" area at 12th & Elm Street in 1868. August Kroell was also the driving force and is credited as founder of the "German Protestant Orphans Home" (GPOH) now "Beech Acres". GPOH was organized in 1849, following a cholera epidemic in Cincinnati which left many children orphans. The concern was that these children be raised Protestant in the tradition of their parents, and no orphan home existed for this purpose.

In 1874, "Papa Kroell" pastorate ended with his death and he was mourned throughout the city.

During his ministry, Kroell tried to organize many of the numerous independent German churches in the middle west into a "Protestantische Bund", with the "Zeiblaetter" as the official organ. A journal for their Sunday Schools, the "Der Jugendreuend" and a hymm book were compiled. Reverend G. W. Eisenlohr was again a collaborator.

Finding a successor for "Papa Kroell" was difficult and unsuccessful, even though Reverend J. Carl Scholz (1875-1884) tried. The church declined, and the congregation finally called Reverend Hugo G. Eisenlohr (1884-1931) from St. John's Church in Wheeling, West Virginia to remedy the problem.

H. G. Eisenlohr's task was to restore the lost ground, re-establish the liberal tradition and negotiate the delicate transition from an all German church to an acceptable mix of English and German. Eisenlohr had discovered that although the St. John's children could memorize German text, they did not understand it.

For its long life from 1814 to 1922, St. John's was independent except for the few years of membership in the "Protestantische Bund", and H. G. Eisenlohr feared that his life's work at St. John's might be discarded after his death, if the church did not affiliate with a larger cause. Due to his patient prodding, he successfully saw the church become a member of the American Unitarian Association in 1924 and become St. John's Unitarian Church.

Please let me close on a personal note. My mother, who is 97 at this time, came to St. John's as a little girl, and her mother was married by St. John's Minister Carl Scholz in 1876, so my roots are deep. Her picture appears in the Confirmation Class of 1903, 4th row back, 3rd from your right. In searching for my grandfather, Joseph Reiman's records at the 3rd Protestant Memorial Church (marriage records show Reverend Carl Tuerck performed the ceremony), I found both christening records and also the St. John's connection in their 125th Anniversary Booklet.

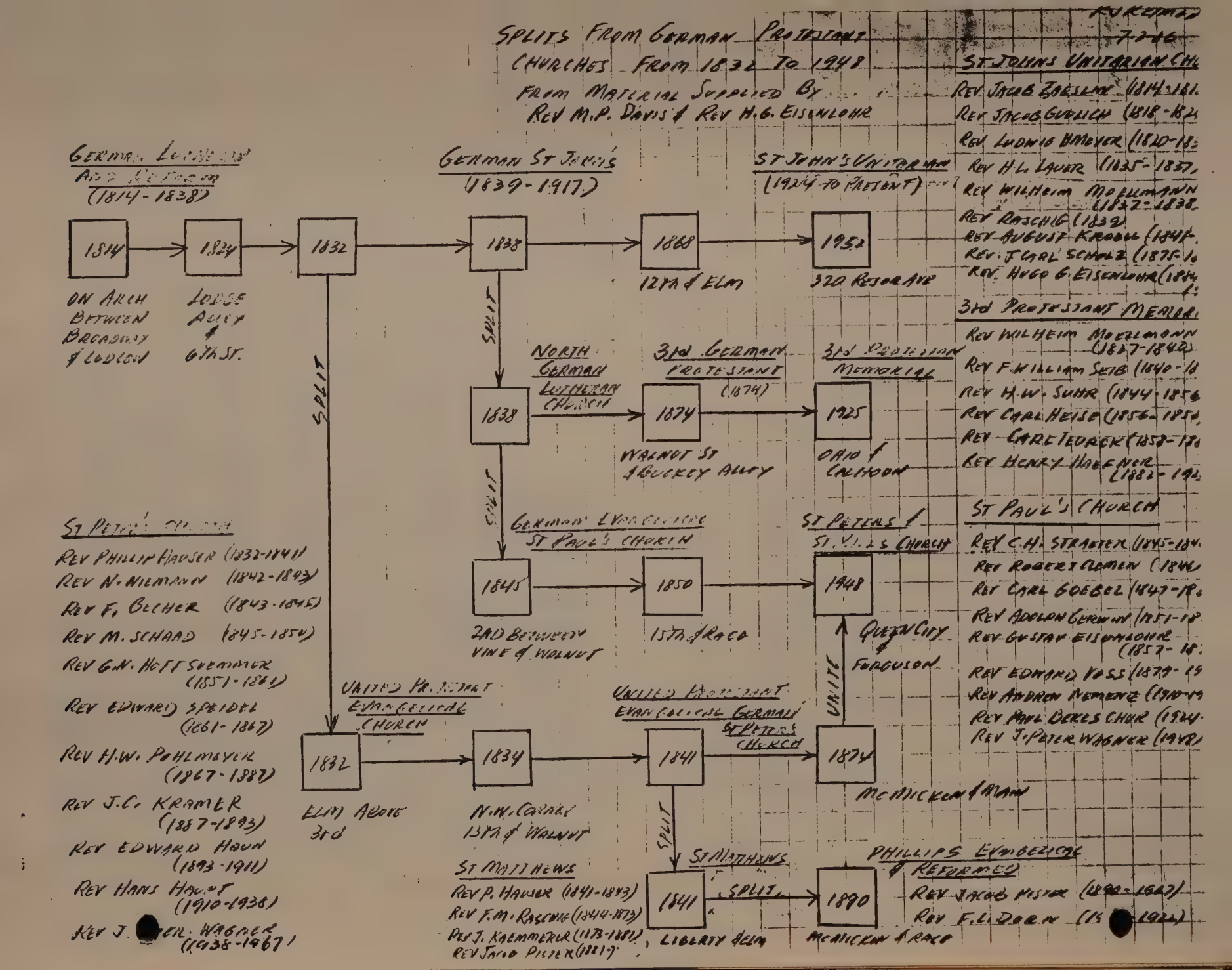
Thank you for your participation. Following, will be a short film of the St. John's congregation at 12th & Elm Streets during Reverend Hugo G. Eisenlohr's ministry. I hope you enjoy watching it.

Richard J. Reiman

Richard J. Reiman

SPLITS FROM GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCHES FROM 1832 TO 1948

FROM MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY ... REV M.P. DAVIS & REV H.G. EISENLOHR



Capsule History

1814 — St. John's organized under name German Evangelical and Reformed Church by Joseph Zaeslin.

1820 — Church calls Ludwig Meyer after Zaeslin's death in ~~1817~~ 1818.

1832 — Congregation weathers first split after controversy between conservative and liberal elements. Meyer resigns in 1835.

1838 — Final split in congregation. Liberal character of founding group remains intact.

1841 — August Kroell installed and church enjoys long era of prosperity and influence.

1868 — Church moves to 12th and Elm Streets.

1875 — J. Carl Scholz installed after Kroell's death in 1874. Congregation changes name to German Protestant St. John's, loses ground gained under Kroell. Scholz resigns in 1884.

1884 — Hugo Eisenlohr installed, restores church to leadership and financial stability. Changes official church language to English.

1924 — St. John's affiliated with American Unitarian Association, changes name to St. John's Unitarian Church.

1931 — Julius Krolfifer installed, Eisenlohr continues as minister-emeritus until his death in 1940.

1946 — 12th and Elm property sold. Services conducted in Hanselmann Temple for 6 years.

1949 — Resor Avenue property purchased.

1952 — First service in new building. Krolfifer resigns in 1955, dies 6 months later.

1956 — Clarke Wells installed.

1960 — New sanctuary completed and first service held.

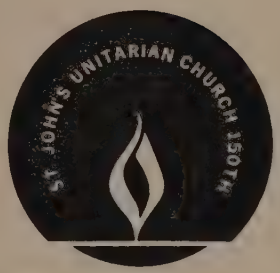
1964 — Church celebrates Sesquicentennial.

Inside front cover, the sanctuary at the 12th and Elm St. Church decorated for the 100th Anniversary celebration in 1914.

Right: Medal struck for the 100th Anniversary. Note 12th and Elm St. Chuch and figure of Eisenlohr, then Minister.

good history file
Eisenlohr - wrote a history of St. John's
Davis - did a list of translation work
Eisenlohr Cartridge - found additional records

St. John's Sesquicentennial



In a land of swift change and short history such as ours, a 150th anniversary may rightly be regarded as a triumph of survival. But for St. John's Unitarian Church, now in the 150th year of a unique and humane religious tradition, the central triumph of this celebration is found not in the numbering of the years, but in the lives and work of men. St. John's had a fortunate share of men of good heart and strong faith. It is they who have brought us to this moment and this place.

FROM THE BEGINNING

In 1814, by any standards, Cincinnatians were still on the frontier. They had no police force, no sewers, no waterworks, but they did have something of great value—a sturdy, liberal and optimistic new society. When Moravian minister Joseph Zaeslin, lately of Philadelphia, came to town to found a church among the Germans here, he successfully gathered together not only the Protestants he was seeking, but Catholics as well, and together they worshipped in harmony for nearly ten years. This was St. John's beginning.

Not all its congregations since then have enjoyed such accord. But all have kept faith with its early promise. From that day to this, the traditions of religious diversity, free inquiry and the right of individual conscience have found shelter and support in this church.

Jan Hus - 100 years earlier than Martin Luth
Zaeslin b. in Basel, Swit.
German Evan + Lutheran Ref. Church
Started a German Sunday School, pupils coming
from 100 miles away - mostly to keep the
German language alive.

The Ministry

St. John's history is written in chapters titled Zaeslin, Meyer, Kroell, Scholz, Eisenlohr, Krolfifer and Wells. These, its ministers, influenced the church each according to his own gifts. A few served briefly, simply sustaining the church; others left a lifetime of service, enriching St. John's immeasurably.

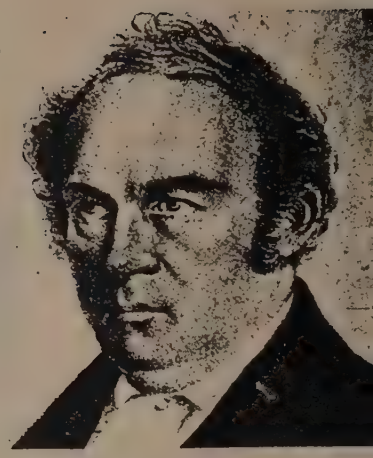
ZAESLIN 1814-~~1817~~ 1817

Joseph Zaeslin's enlightened ministry which brought St. John's into being, was too-soon terminated by his sudden death in 1817, but he left a sound foundation. The first congregation was small—60 to 80 members—and poor, but Zaeslin's classical education and gifted oratory set a standard of excellence with which the congregation refused to compromise and it wasn't until 1820 that a satisfactory replacement was found in Ludwig Henry Meyer.

MEYER 1820-1835

The briefest study of Cincinnati history shows that in matters politic and religious, our forebears enjoyed nothing better than a rousing debate, which accounts perhaps, for a certain attitude of resignation about Meyer's profile, right. His reign was not a wholly peaceful one. Indeed, during a particularly lively congregational meeting in the old two-story clapboard schoolhouse which served Meyer as a church,

Ludwig Meyer 1820-1835



August Kroell 1841-1874

No photographs or sketches of Zaeslin or Scholz are known to exist.

Jacob Ludwig Henry Meyer, a layman before Meyer, a north German, low German; aka Plattdeutsch

rishioners debated (i.e. scuffled) so heat- over whether or not to erect a new build- that the rotten old floor collapsed beneath m, tumbling the company into the basement d forcing an affirmative vote.

new church was built on Third Street near Broadway, and the congregation and its outstanding church school prospered. In 1833, a larger church, on Sixth Street, shown right, was purchased for $7000. But prosperity or no, 15 years was enough for the good Pastor Meyer and in 1835 he retired.

The map at the left shows Cincinnati at the start of Meyer's ministry. Downtown was nearly all the town there was and Main Street property sold for $200 a foot. But by 1830, the town had mushroomed to a cosmopolitan 24,000 citizens, and St. John's had its share of growing pains. During the 1830's the persistent and un-brotherly dissention which had so plagued Meyer, between the ~~liberal~~ TRADITIONAL High (Northern) Germans and the ~~traditional~~ LIBERAL Low (Southern) Germans, resulted in several splits in the congregation. Three luckless ministers came and hurriedly left in the next four years, but finally, a man who was to have a lasting

Left, map of Cincinnati 1819.

Above, the Sixth Street Church, in 1821.

influence on the church and on the city as well, accepted the ministry and a rich and peaceful era dawned for St. John's.

KROELL 1841-1874

August Kroell, shown on page 4 without the snowy beard that identifies him in many later photos, had emigrated from Germany to Baltimore about 1835 and made his way West by foot and by flatboat to the "land of golden opportunity." In 1841, when he accepted St. John's pastorate, he began by a brilliant and outspokenly liberal leadership, to weld its warring factions into one of the most progressive and influential churches in a city that was to become the third largest in the U.S. during his term.

sent Meyer back to Pa. to buy a horse, raised $1,000 sold horse after he got back

In 1867 the congregation purchased the property at 12th and Elm Streets for $19,000 and the following year, moved into their brand new church. By 1870 St. John's had the largest church school in the city. The congregation, enriched by the addition of many liberals fleeing the German Revolutions of 1848 and 1849, supported Kroell's famous weekly journal, *The Protestant Zeitblaetter*—the chief voice of liberal Protestantism in the U.S. Kroell also helped to found the General Protestant Orphans Home, still in existence today. For 33 years he was "Papa" Kroell to his congregation and to countless Cincinnatians of all faiths. When he died in 1874, a funeral cortege of 185 carriages paid him a remarkable last tribute.

SCHOLZ 1875-1884

The photo at right shows the old Sixth Street Church in 1880, fallen upon sad days. The congregation had long since moved into its handsome new home at 12th and Elm, (shown at far right with its steeple intact and later, after its removal), but they too, had fallen upon sad days. AE18R At Kroell's death ~~in 1875,~~ the Reverend J. Carl Scholz took over the pastorate, but Kroell's shoes were very hard to fill. Scholz was far from the outspoken champion of liberalism that St. John's had followed for so long. The days of open and heated rebellion had long passed, but gradually the congregation began

to drift. Membership dropped to about 200, while the church debt mounted. Finally, in 1884, Scholz resigned.

EISENLOHR 1884-1931

The faltering church waited only three months and then, in October of 1884, Hugo G. Eisenlohr was called from Wheeling, West Virginia to fill the vacant pulpit. Eisenlohr was only 24 when he took the helm at St. John's, but his Unitarian ministerial training at Meadville Theological School, (then located in Meadville, Penn.) was to have a significant influence on St. John's future. Very soon the congregation discovered that Eisenlohr was cut from the same cloth as Kroell: liberal, kindly, utterly devoted to his people. Historically, it fell to Eisenlohr to lead St. John's out of its Germanic parochialism and

into the far more complex and uncertain 20th Century.

The German tradition was a long and sturdy one at St. John's. The earliest known church constitution states that for all coming time, German only shall be spoken at all church functions and for over 80 years the rule was followed. It was Eisenlohr who discovered that the young people of the church (shown proudly arrayed on pages 12-13 in their confirmation and picnic finery), were commiting the German texts to memory with little idea of their meaning. He promptly took the matter up with his Board of Trustees and in 1901, to the children's great delight, the first English-speaking classes were introduced in the Sunday school. By 1918, all services and other church functions were conducted wholly in English.

At the turn of the century, Eisenlohr's Church, more formally German Protestant St. John's Church, was lively, liberal and independent. In the years to follow, Eisenlohr more than doubled the membership and restored the church to financial stability, but he was well aware of the fate of independent churches when their leaders are lost. Accordingly, in 1923, he proposed that St. John's affiliate with the American Unitarian Association and in the following year, by congregational vote, this was accomplished. The name of the church was

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last sermon in German was at beginning of WW I

Dick

then changed to its present St. John's Unitarian Church. In 1931, after a record 47-year pastorate, Eisenlohr retired and in September of that year Julius Krolfifer was installed as minister.

KROLFIFER 1931-~~1955~~ 1956

Julius Krolfifer, a New Yorker, was ~~the first of St. John's native-born ministers~~. A serious scholar of the Bible and New Testament in his early teens, he completed his ministerial training in ~~1913~~ 1913 at Union Theological Seminary. After 16 years of parish work, he was called to St. John's.

In 1946, the church at 12th and Elm Streets was sold and the congregation met for services at Hänselmann Temple on Clifton Avenue until the present Resor Avenue property was purchased. Ground was broken in June, 1951, and the first service conducted in September of 1952. Three years later Julius Krolfifer's long and faithful years of service to St. John's, well within the memory of most of the present congregation, ended with his resignation.

WELLS 1956

Born and reared in Michigan, Clarke Dewey Wells was the second graduate of Meadville Theological School to answer a call to St. John's. After two years as Associate Minister at First Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City, he was installed at St. John's in 1956. Under his leadership the church has involved itself significantly in a broad program in support of the arts. Our sanctuary, with its Bertoia sculpture and unique organ, completed in 1960, is an artistic landmark in Cincinnati. Under Wells' leadership our concern for the pressing social issues of our time has found expression in our support of the civil rights movement. St. John's is also cooperating in the training of future Unitarian ministers with its Internship program, now in its third year. Our Sesquicentennial year has seen a record growth in our church school.

In this, its 150th year, St. John's still enjoys a bountiful share of men of good heart, strong faith, and high hopes for the future.

Left, students in a church school class in one of the seven new school rooms added with the sanctuary in 1960.

Right, interior of the sanctuary during a service, Mr. Wells speaking to the congregation.

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